

Valantina Abu Oqsa in the houses of liberated female prisoners

Her new theatre project starts from there

From Haifa, to Ramallah, to Arraba, to Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Jenin, and Nablus, the Palestinian artist Valantina Abu Oqsa continues to travel for months now to pay special visits to several liberated female prisoners who spent long years in Israeli occupation's prisons. The prisoners narrated to Abu Oqsa the stories of their arrest, interrogation, and about the living conditions in Israeli jails. Valantina engaged in detailed conversations with the prisoners including even private details. She recorded and documented these conversations not just with the aim of searching for the truth, as she describes it, but also with the aim of exploring its details. The ages and the experiences of the prisoners chosen by Abu Oqsa for this research vary as did their political affiliations.

Valantina met also with a number of liberated prisoners learning and exploring in depth their special experiences. Abu Oqsa had embarked for almost a year now on studying and reviewing a large number of books, articles, and studies in this context. During each of her visits with the prisoners, she also received books and studies about the same subject and met with several lawyers and human rights activists working for organizations that provide legal counseling. Her aim was to document the largest amount possible of information about their experiences in cases of political detention. Valantina continues her journey and continues to delve deeper into this issue.

Valantina reveals " when I have an issue starts to preoccupy my mind, I usually think deeply about the answers. The first thing that come to my mind and stays there is : what can I do?? The issue of political prisoners have been preoccupying my mind for a long long time now. This is not only a political issue, but rather a humanitarian issue par excellence because it attempts to strip a human being from his basic right to think and defend his thoughts. Additionally, one has to look at the dangerous humanitarian consequences and repercussions that this issue has on the families of the prisoners and ultimately the overall aspirations of the peoples in freedom, particularly our Palestinian people where not one single family was spared the experience of detention and in particular the experience of loss.

Valantina adds ' this concern did not emanate only from a situation where I wonder where this is going to lead me in view of the impasse on the political level. Ever since my childhood until this millennium nothing has changed, those who face the bag of dirt placed over their heads or those who are handcuffed and mistreated, nothing has changed. We live in a place where the free human being has to continuously defend his freedom, his dignity, and his free and dignified future.

Why now?

It was not possible to address an issue so important and so big and so dangerous on the stage. It was not possible to walk down this complicated path before being confident that my own intellectual and professional maturity would help me in taking this initiative. I started not only in search for facts but rather for the tiniest details about these facts. Based on my convictions-which were validated after each thorough reading in this regards- I realized I didn't know enough and I realized I needed to learn more about it.

My decision to lend these papers a voice and my choice of field research, which is at the heart of this project, pushed me into the challenge to meet face to face with several women who performed heroic actions in Israeli jails. In fact, these are not merely encounters with these women, but rather a trip into the unknown and a journey that revealed a wealth of information that blew my mind away and made this experience an invaluable one, an experience is priceless and defies any budget that a theatre project might expect to incur!!! This project aims at generating a unique and special experience that is not based on the situation conveyed by a text, but rather to create a text that is based on the Palestinian situation. The product is not a monodrama and the production is currently under way!